Lateral

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Review of *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics* by V. Jo Hsu (The Ohio State University Press)

by Stacey Park | Book Reviews, Issue 12.2 (Fall 2023)

ABSTRACT *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics* by V. Jo Hsu examines how queer and trans Asian American (QTAPI) individuals have reshaped the narratives around their belonging in the United States or elsewhere. Hsu recognizes the ways pervasive narratives like the model minority myth have imbued the meaning of Asian American belonging with capitalist, heteronormative, ableist, racist, and patriarchal notions. Exploring oral histories, visual representations, essays, and numerous other forms of rhetoric, Hsu engages in "diasporic listening," a method that unpacks how QTAPI individuals have wrestled with these pervasive narratives and found ways of redefining their belonging. By focusing on the stories of trans, nonbinary, disabled, and other minoritized groups within the Asian American diaspora, Hsu shows how these diverse and individual stories contribute more robust meaning around being and belonging as an Asian American.

KEYWORDS Asian American, ethnicity, narrative, queer, race, rhetoric, trans studies

Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics. By V. Jo Hsu. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2022. 226 pp. (paperback) ISBN: 978-0-8142-5845-3. US List: $29.95.

Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics builds on a central belief in the power of narrative. Stories have the power to be a mirror, moving people toward self-recognition—how, where, and why they belong in the

world around them. Hsu, like many Asian American scholars, recognizes the ways in which the model minority myth is a powerful and pervasive narrative that circulates and harms this process of self-reflection. Hsu offers a cogent analysis and synopsis of how the model minority myth has been imbued with patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist, racist, and capitalist notions, which makes the model minority myth something that many queer, trans, and disabled Asian and Pacific Islanders (QTAPI), across generations, cultures, and regions, confront in one way or another. Hsu's text chronicles the diverse methods and means that queer, trans, and disabled Asian and Pacific Islanders forge their definitions of belonging.

By focusing on individual stories, and highlighting the oral histories, interviews, and visuals of different QTAPI archives, Hsu stitches together narratives like patchwork—bringing together many subjects and their attachments and relations to "love, resilience, and ancestry" (26). This stitching creates a fluid, liberatory constellation of "multiply-situated subjects [that] connect multiple discourses at the same time" (10–11). Attentive to the co-existence of—and at times contradiction between—these stories Hsu uncovers many homes, many ways of belonging. One of the more powerful and beautiful aspects of this book is the way Hsu shows these stories, their uniqueness and idiosyncrasies, already existing. Mapping their stories out to show that there is not one way of being or relating as a QTAPI person—Hsu explicitly notes that bringing these narratives together is not an endeavor to sum up some kind of "singular truth" about being Asian American and Pacific Islander (11). Instead, these constellations are "about listening for and accommodating a multiplicity of relationships and responsibilities" (11). Each chapter outlines the stories that contend with some aspect of the model minority myth, noting the ways in which these individuals have remade their relations to themes of "love, resilience, and ancestry" on their own terms (26).

Chapter 1 draws from stories and interviews that were gathered through the Dragon Fruit Project (DFP), which is "an ongoing oral history project . . . involving

hundreds of volunteers in collecting, coding, and disseminating personal accounts of QTAPI activism from the 1960s to the present" (27). The stories that Hsu draws on from the DFP archives reflect how QTAPI individuals have redefined love, and the expectations of love and romantic relations that are demanded from heteropatriarchal standards. This chapter details the work of Amy Sueyoshi and her interviews with younger and older generations of queer Asian Americans, and outlines several stories of individual QTAPIs who offer "defiant reconfigurations of those social forms" in differing, and even contradictory ways (70). But Hsu recognizes that the "polyvocal nature of the archive" and the "paradoxes" found in these individuals' stories, existing in a constellation, is an illustration of "mobile sites of belonging that maneuver across generational and cultural distance" (70).

Chapter 2 traces a theme of resiliency across the work of Mia Nakano's Visibility Project (VP), which comprises digital archives of queer and disabled Asian and Pacific Islander women and trans people through oral histories preserved mainly through videos, photos, and text. This chapter recognizes that both visibility and invisibility affect Asian Americans in how taxonomies are created and used against them to belittle, fetishize, or dismiss them as less than or other. The portraits and stories in this chapter highlight how individuals have situated their gender, sexuality, strength, and/or beauty through ways that defy how these harmful taxonomies circulate. In examining the VP's work and mission, Hsu notes that "they offer shelter for utopian dreaming" in which "resilience is reimagined as a communicative exchange where participants take shared responsibility for one another's vulnerabilities, fears, and desires" (107). Hsu notes, "If Asian American resilience is understood, not as that which positions us closer to white patriarchy, but as a communal empathy that refuses to leave one another behind, then we are able to revolutionize structures of exclusion rather than simply enter them" (107).

Chapter 3 examines the stories of participants in the Queer Ancestors project (QAP), considering "how the topos of ancestry shapes many LGBTQ+ Asian

American experiences of family and belonging" (111). This chapter "quer[ies] how we can conceive of familial lineages in ways that disrupt, challenge, and reinvent the categories that have isolated and harmed queer diasporic subjects" (113). In Hsu's examination of QAP, they recognize a more complicated legacy of "colonialism, capitalism, and their effects on human and nonhuman lives" and the ways in which QTAPI individuals make connections to ancestry and understand what ancestry means. The linocuts by the young artists contributing to the QAP reflect a disruption of "taxonomies that have organized dominant views of lineage, loyalty, and belonging" (140). Instead of finding oneself in some hereditary chain that is bound up in colonial ideas of race, origin, and/or ethnicity, Hsu points the reader to explore "a kuaer pedagogy that is open to novel identifications while grounded in material inequities and corporeal difference" (140). Hsu asks, "If the story we tell of our lineages is only one (restrictive) means of accessing kinship, how else could we draw our networks of care and our homeward journeys? How would doing so hold us accountable for settler exploitation, racial injustice, trans and queer phobia, ableism, and a wounded planet? What languages would we invent to access and nurture those connections?" (140) Hsu poses these questions at the end of the chapter, prompting readers to consider how there are endless possibilities and ways of acknowledging the past to make way for a more restorative future.

Chapter 4 is Hsu's own self-reflection and process of "queer diasporic homing" that highlights their "bodymind" as an archive—they show the reader how memory and the traces of one's story live in body as well. Hsu writes, "I propose here that the body, too, is an archive—that we carry with us our experiences and the stories we are given. We exceed them too, but these are the materials from which we build our worldviews" (149). Recounting their own experiences as a queer, trans, and disabled Asian American, this chapter points the reader to the ways in which Hsu has forged their own attachments to love, resiliency, and ancestry. They provide a glimpse into their family's history and Taiwanese cultural background, their experiences with their illness, their experience growing up in

Arizona, and the various circumstances that buttressed the writing of the book itself and its ideas. This last chapter, and the conclusion, is a display of vulnerability and boldness, revealing how Hsu found their “way home” through their encounters and being in community with other queer, trans, and disabled Asian and Pacific islanders.

Hsu’s book is like a tapestry of stories, a tapestry that queer, trans, and disabled Asian and Pacific Islanders can recognize themselves in and are, by way of their existence, a part of. The mundane, significant, and diverse ways these individuals define their belonging co-exist in a cosmic orbit that is alive and thriving. For those interested in rhetoric studies, trans and queer studies, and Asian American studies, this book offers a case study in queer, trans, and disabled Asian and Pacific islander historiography and storytelling, depicting how these individuals have always forged, and will continue to forge, ways of being “at home” in their bodies and the spaces they occupy.

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